

Sometimes the reader will find it hard to understand what is being pictured or told. Although somewhat romantic or naïve at some points – certainly throughout chapter six and particularly when Fortin depicts military governments as ‘frustrated and desperate to do something that would relieve social pressures by paying more attention to the “civic wounds” of poor people’ (p. 76) – it is a worthwhile reading for those concerned with poor people’s struggles, resilience and accomplishments in a world where petty politics play the most powerful role.

Lucia Capanema-Alvares, Universidade Federal Fluminense

– *Affordable Housing in the Global Urban South: Seeking Sustainable Solutions*, edited by Jan Bredenoord, Paul van Lindert and Peer Smets. Earthscan/Routledge, 2014.

The edited volume by Jan Bredenoord, Paul van Lindert and Peer Smets aims to reassert the role of housing for achieving sustainable urbanization by placing emphasis on its multi-dimensional nature and the consequent requirement of both an institutional and a disciplinary integration for housing delivery. This essential assertion is moved by the explicit ambition to contribute to the international debate on the new urban agenda and is reflected in the variety of contributions by well-established authors and experienced researchers in the field. After a main introduction and a mixed thematic section on low-income housing, the subsequent 17 chapters are divided across three sections based on macro-regions, followed by a concluding contribution by the editors.

As the title underscores, the dimensions of affordability and sustainability are the selected entry points to advocate for pro-poor pluriform housing solutions and to influence the habitat agenda. Besides discussing these two central dimensions with regard to housing delivery, the relevance of a stakeholder approach is highlighted with vigour as part and parcel of the plea to incorporate self-managed housing practices in public and formal delivery systems (p. 2). Both the thematic and the country policy chapters expose the significance of co-production for the provision of sustainable dwelling environments where the cooperation between sectors, resident empowerment and the elaboration of locally grounded livelihoods are acknowledged as fundamental ingredients for a holistic approach to urban and housing development (p. 4). Placing the latter under the umbrella of governance is also a way to recognize the range of contexts, actors and stakeholders that should be accounted for in the articulation of new low-income shelter strategies in the urban Global South. Such variety is not only a trait to be mirrored in policy formulation, but becomes a word of caution in the editors’ closing comments with regard to the treacherous reliance on uniform urban planning and land management tools (p. 401). Moreover, the conclusion highlights the fact that similar outcomes of housing delivery sys-

tems may result from distinctive governance networks, an aspect that is particularly crucial for community-driven development and cooperative scheme stimulation. The concluding remarks also remind the reader that, while innovative policy packages and stakeholder constellations can be noticed in all scrutinized contexts, serving the poorest segments of society remains an extremely arduous objective to attain.

This insightful compendium deserves to be read, with well-informed accounts of policies and practices from the urban global South as complementary contributions to the various thematic state of the art reviews. The challenge of producing sustainable and affordable low-income housing is therefore reasserted with evidence from various countries across the globe. Nonetheless, precisely because of its ambitious aims and promising organization, the reader is left with questions about chapter clustering and its actual meaning for influencing the new urban agenda in particular, and urban research in general. At a moment when pleas for comparative approaches have engendered an exciting terrain for policy development and research across contexts and cultures, the reader is left to wonder why macro-regions are the privileged entry point to discuss such themes, and will only find an answer in the volume's final pages. The concluding discussion confirms the curatorial potential of an inquiry more overtly directed at opening up cross-national perspectives that the editors themselves signal when linking massive public housing provision programmes in Mexico and Egypt, or when noticing the differences in community-driven development in Asia and Latin America. Likewise, a comparative setup aligned with the main thematic section could have delivered further insight on the ways to confront land scarcity and the urban fabric's densification as major challenges for the delivery of aided self-help across the globe.

More than providing 'local empirical evidence' (p. xxv), the finest country papers of the collection posit the urban global South as the true terrain for the actual elaboration of resourceful approaches to the delivery of affordable and sustainable low-income dwelling environments. This reversal is not only key for knowledge production epistemologies, but also for the understanding of locally grounded innovative solutions in the context of extensive decentralization. As an example, it remains a pity that innovative experiences such as the Amui Djor housing in Accra fail to be mentioned in the contribution on Ghana, especially considering the editors' questions on what form pioneering practices will take in areas with rising urbanization rates and uneven social movement organization. Indeed, as acknowledged in the volume, Latin America is the context where the universally practised process of self-managed housing by incremental construction has been most speedy and effective. This raises interrogations on the impact of citizen mobilization and long-standing urbanization records on the development of self-help as an affordable sustainable practice and on the stakeholder arrangements required to promote and improve its delivery. By seeking for innovative approaches rather than presenting a definitive set of 'best practices', the volume presents a commendable effort to re-centre

and revise assisted self-help housing policies and practices, though the role of governance in this quest would have required further unravelling.

Viviana d'Auria, KU Leuven

– *¡Tequila! Distilling the Spirit of Mexico*, by Marie Sarita Gaytán, Stanford University Press, 2014.

Marie Sarita Gaytán's book, *¡Tequila! Distilling the Spirit of Mexico* is a welcome addition to the already vibrant canon of works that reveal, what Arjun Appadurai famously described as 'the social life of things'. While everything from rats to paperclips has had their social life scrutinized, it is usually food-stuff (cods, sugar, bananas, pigs, salt, lobsters) and their by-products (guano, anyone?) that have increasingly fascinated academics over the past fifteen years. These authors view consumable commodities as much more than tasty delivery mechanisms for calories; in their eyes food and drinks, while retaining their centrality as sources for sociability and conviviality, are also sites where some of our most contentious ideas about who we are as members of modern imagined communities are developed and struggled over.

In Mexican studies, it was Jeffrey Pilcher's *¡Que Vivan Los Tamales!* (1998) that set the agenda for much of the food scholarship that has followed. Gaytán does not wander too far off the path that Pilcher established. While Pilcher writes about tamales, mole, and chiles enogada, Gaytán is primarily concerned with showing how one iconic product, tequila, has been central to nourishing, as she states, the 'symbolic economy of identity' of Mexican nationalism. Rather than order this exploration of tequila's relationship to *lo mexicano* (Mexicanness) as a historical narrative, Gaytán organizes her book as a series of episodes she calls 'shots'. After exploring the theoretical and social concerns that ground her study in the Introduction, Gaytán uses the first chapter to answer how tequila became the liquid embodiment of 'Mexico's national spirit'. Central to this narrative is explaining why it was that other alcoholic drinks, especially pulque and the mezcal produced in regions outside of the state of Jalisco, lost out on this honour. Essentially, Gaytán argues that drinks like pulque and the mezcal produced in Oaxaca were at a great disadvantage because they, unlike the mezcal from the region of Tequila, were 1) produced and consumed in regions that were economically marginal and physically isolated; 2) not suitable for export beyond the point of production (pulque spoils in a couple of days); and 3) artisanal products that were too easily associated with Mexico's Indian population, not a good thing for a nation aspiring to be modern.

In the second part of the book, Gaytán explores two episodes in the symbolic life of tequila. In Chapter 2, she investigates the irony of how, in both Mexico and the United States, the teetotaler Mexican revolutionary, Pancho Villa,